

# A SCRIPTURAL, THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF THE ZAMBIAN CHRISTIAN NATIONHOOD

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## ABSTRACT

The article contributes to an understanding of the notion of Zambian Christian nationhood, which was first officially expressed in a presidential decree. The declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation was made by Fredrick Chiluba, the second President of the Republic of Zambia, on 29 December 1991. In June 1996, an amendment to the Constitution of Zambia Act of 1991, which included the Zambian Christian nation declaration, was effected, from which moment Zambia officially became regarded as a 'Christian nation'. The current article proposes that a country cannot attain its Christian nationhood by presidential decree, but only by means of cultural determination. However, an extensive evaluation of the culture concerned is needed in order for the task to be theologically feasible. To achieve a comprehensive analysis of the current situation, the article takes into consideration some of the historical paradigms and models of regions which were once Christian, but which have since failed to stand by such principles. The point of the present argument is that religion emanates from the culture of the people and not from a declaration that is made about them. The article also takes into consideration Niebuhr's fivefold typology of models of the relationship of Christ with culture, to which this article refers as that existing between church and state. The ultimate conclusion is that the declaration of Zambia as a 'Christian nation', despite being a unique concept, must be both theologically and ethically sound if, indeed, it is to become more than just a slogan and a single-line entry in the preamble of the country's constitution.

## INTRODUCTION

*Therefore it is out of the question that there should be a common Christian government over the whole world or indeed over a single country or any considerable body of people, for the wicked always outnumber the good. Hence, a man who would venture to govern an entire country or the world with the gospel would be like a shepherd who should put together in one fold wolves, lions, eagles and sheep, and let them mingle freely with one another, saying, 'help yourselves, be good and peaceful toward one another. The fold is open, there is plenty of food. You need have no fear of dogs and clubs.' The sheep would doubtless keep the peace and allow themselves to be fed and governed peacefully, but they would not live long, nor would one beast survive another.*

(Luther 1523:665–666)

Martin Luther (1483–1546), one of the foremost reformers of the Christian church, states unequivocally that it is impossible to bring about the governance of any country as a Christian state. Luther's statement reflects the dilemma that currently faces Zambia, for the country adopted its 'Christian nation' status seventeen years ago, not by proclamation of the state itself, but by means of presidential decree (Chiluba 1991). The declaration that Zambia was a 'Christian nation' was made by the second president of the Republic, Dr Fredrick Chiluba, on 29 December 1991, shortly after his election to the presidency. In June 1996, an amendment to the Constitution of Zambia Act of 1991, which was so worded as to include the Zambian 'Christian nation' declaration, was effected. (*Constitution of Zambia Amendment Act 18 of 1996*). The declaration aroused such public debate that the Mung'omba Constitutional Review Commission (CRC) recommended the removal of the above-mentioned declaration from the constitution in a draft constitution, which was released in June 2006. Whereas such a recommendation has drawn condemnation from some religious circles, it has drawn support from others.

Without question, the declaration is unclear both theologically and constitutionally and also with regard to the question of what it means when a political entity such as a nation is declared to be Christian. Certainly, from a dogmatic point of view, one cannot baptise a nation, or even all of the fifteen million or so inhabitants of a nation state, let alone expect that an entire nation should profess the Apostles' Creed. In the same way, neither can a nation perform a liturgical act of Christian worship which, by and large, would manifest a spirit of true Christian nationhood. These are some of the difficult concerns that neither the state nor the churches in Zambia have thought out in a way that might bring clarity and understanding to such a situation. Constitutionally, in contrast, Zambia belongs just as much to those citizens who profess to believe in other faiths as it does to those who profess a belief in Christianity. Legislating faith and religion in the Constitution might lead to a spirit of fundamentalism that could lead to the abuse of religion for purely political ends. Such abuse would amount to an unjustifiable way of proclaiming the gospel.

Since the 1992 declaration, Christianity, as it is practised in Zambia, has been brought into the political fray, to the detriment of the faith. To such an effect, the Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC), a major Christian body which is dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, has argued for a

*secular constitution ... that would be non-religious and neutral with respect to the truth of any particular religion rather than repeat the likeness of Constantine's era that brought serious consequences on Christians in later regimes.*

(Henriot 1998)

In the current article, I wish to consider the above mentioned declaration in the light of an analysis of the relevant scriptural, theological and historical models upon which the concept of Christian nationhood might be based. My assumption that the task is theologically probable does not preclude that it might, in reality, be impossible. Zambia's peculiar historical situation might, quite possibly, have no precedent. In that case, critical reflection on, and the analysis of, the various paradigms that might inform the Zambian situation is necessary before engaging in critical argumentation on the subject matter concerned. Such reflection and analysis are difficult per se, as engaging in such effort demands courage, diligence and seriousness, qualities that are not always the hallmarks of evangelical thinking. One writer calls such lack of profundity the 'scandal of the evangelical mind', referring to the inability of many Christians to be 'workmen who have no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of God' (2 Tm 2:2), which results from 'doing our biblical and theological homework with diligence in order to avoid confusion and superficiality' (Sider 1997:2)

The current article comprises four sections. In the first section, the focus is on the background to Zambian Christian nationhood, rationale and implications. In the second section, I will attempt to explore some of the more pertinent biblical texts to be found in either the Old or the New Testament. In the third section, an attempt is made to find a model, or models, that might inform Zambia's concept of Christian nationhood. To achieve such a task, some theological and historical models of Christian nationhood will be examined, using Richard Niebuhr's fivefold typology models of the relationship between Christ and culture (Niebuhr 1951). Finally, I hope to develop a Christian ethical framework or model, pointing to the way ahead for the concept of Christian nationhood for Zambia to become more than just a slogan and a single-line entry in the preamble of the country's Constitution.

## ZAMBIAN CONCEPT: 'CHRISTIAN NATIONHOOD'

### Origin and rationale

Zambia, as a nation, came into existence at midnight on 24 October 1964, when it declared its independence from Britain. From a total population of approximately four million at independence, the population has grown steadily to a nation of approximately 15 million at present, having emerged from a conglomeration of seventy-two tribes. When Zambia declared its independence from Britain, English was adopted as the official imperial language of the state. Being a landlocked country, surrounded by many different countries, namely Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, Zambia is perceived as a trade centre and a destination for trade by people of different backgrounds and nationalities.

The perceived unity that appeared to bind the country together at independence in order to enable it to overcome the prevailing forces of colonialism was not Christianity or a common love for one another, but, rather, a common hatred of colonial domination and the imperial regime. Owing to such a consideration, I wish, in the current article, to define Zambia as a 'proto nation' and an 'imagined' community (Hosbawn 1990:46). History has shown that Zambia, as a nation, has not yet managed to develop a stable definition of itself since its independence in 1964. Each president who has ruled Zambia so far has attempted to reconstruct a Constitution that might rightly embody the principles underlying the nation of Zambia, only to be replaced by the next reformulation of such. To this day, no Zambian Constitution has stood the test of time. My proposition, therefore, is that the state of Zambia is an imagined nation.

Christianity became the religion of the Zambian people long before the country gained its independence from Britain. Christianity and African religion have for decades been the major religions in Zambia. From the early 19th century onwards,

European missionaries established mission centres along tribal lines which, by and large, overlooked most Zambian culture. Dr David Livingstone (1813–1873), of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in the late 19th century, saw the start of European missionary ventures into Zambia, in which country he died at the Chitambo mission station in Chipundu, which is situated in the present Central Province of Zambia. Most conversions to Christianity amounted to little more than concealment of the 'old habits, attitudes fears and practices by some regulations and traditions which did not answer to peoples' needs' (Bendiako 1997:3; see also Oger 1991:231). Though the people of the time had different cultural practices and beliefs, the influence of Christian missionaries established a common ground for establishing a compromise.

When industry first started to expand rapidly in the early 1900s in the Copper Belt region of present-day Zambia, many people migrated from the rural areas to work in the newly opened mines in the region. When they did so, the members of the different tribes found common ground for the development of new relationships between the tribes, resulting in much intermarrying and the development of cross-cultural relations, which became a basis for unity, as acknowledged in the formulation of the motto 'One Zambia–One nation' (OZN). The establishment of such unity in the midst of much diversity gave rise to the establishment of the largest Protestant Church in Zambia, namely the United Church of Zambia (UCZ), on 16 January 1965 at Mindolo in Kitwe. The Church itself was to become a union of different Christian missionary groups, such as those of the London Missionary Society (LMS), of the Free Church of Scotland, of the Paris Evangelical Church of France, of the Methodist Church of Britain, of the Primitive Methodist Church, and of the Copper Belt Union Church, among others too numerous to mention. The different denominations were to form one large church missionary enterprise which, by and large, would approach the missionary work to be done for Christ in the spirit of oneness in Christ. Since that time, Christianity has spread to every district of the country, being relatively unchallenged by the proponents of other faiths.

In the last nationwide census, which was conducted by Central Statistics of Zambia in 2000, 87.5% of the respondents reported membership of at least one Christian church at some stage. Such a percentage is assumed to have increased since the time of the census, with the next nationwide census to be conducted in 2010.

The first three presidents of the country, namely Kenneth Kaunda (1964–1991), Fredrick Chiluba (1991–2001) and Levy Mwanawasa (2001–2008), were affected by missionary activities. Kenneth Kaunda, in particular, was a son of a missionary of the Church of Scotland, who worked at Livingstonia Mission in modern Malawi. Fredrick Chiluba and Levy Mwanawasa, similarly, grew up under missionary influence and inspiration in the Copper Belt region of Zambia. All three presidents participated in the development of the UCZ in different capacities.

Against such a background, when President Fredrick Chiluba was elected President of the Republic of Zambia in October 1991, with Levy Mwanawasa as his Vice-president, he declared, on 29 December 1991, that Zambia was a Christian nation, which had entered into a covenant with God. Standing between the pillars of a government state house building, President Fredrick Chiluba (1991) made the Christian nation declaration, on behalf of the nation of Zambia, as follows:

*On behalf of the nation, I have now entered into a covenant with the living God and therefore, I want to make the following declaration. I say here today that I submit myself as President to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I likewise submit the government and the entire nation of Zambia to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I further declare that Zambia is a Christian nation that will seek to be governed by the righteous principles of the word of God. Righteousness and justice must prevail in all levels of authority and we shall see the righteousness of God exalting Zambia. My fellow Zambians let this message reach all civil servants in all*

*government departments. The time of corruption and bribery is over. For too long these wicked practices have been destroying and tearing down the nation. Now the hour has come for our building up. The hour has come for our stability. Proverbs 29:4 declares 'Who is greedy for bribes tears down a nation, but by justice a king gives the country stability.*

(Chiluba 1991:5)

President Chiluba believed that, by presidential decree, Zambia could be governed by the principles of God and that God could be officially regarded as the father of the nation. Through the public pronouncement of such a declaration by the then head of state, the concept of a 'Zambian Christian nationhood' was born.

The principle of 'Zambian Christian nationhood' came to be regarded as a strong weapon and all who opposed it were threatened with God's wrath. In 1995, the then Vice-president Brigadier General Godfrey Miyanda, in an interview on Frank Mutubila's *Frank Talk* programme, which was broadcast on Zambia National Broadcasting Cooperation (ZNBC) television, reaffirmed the declaration, saying:

*Zambia has become the 'chosen nation' the 'new Israel'. The leaders are anointed, hence nobody has a right to question them or disagree with them. Hence the view of the opposition is seen as representing evil since they always go against God's chosen leader.*

(ZNBC, 05 August 1995)

To that effect, Chiluba Christianised every aspect of government administration, established a new Ministry of Religious Affairs, and publicly donated money to Christian churches. Such actions, however, caused a major rift in church-state relations, as well as among church organisations. Those who supported the declaration saw themselves as allies of the political administration and of true 'Christians'. Those who were apprehensive about the impact that such a declaration might have were perceived as pseudo-Christians and as being against the political administration. However, those Christians who supported the 'Christian nation' declaration saw it as the voicing of a challenge which was intended to Christianise politics. A pastor of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God was quoted as having said that '70 to 80 percent of the Zambian 8.5 million were Christians.' As a result, 'there was nothing wrong with declaring the country Christian'. Since Zambia's population was mostly Christian, it was inferred that Christian principles and laws could be implemented in the governance of the country.

In the light of such thinking, a Christian lawyer, Dr Beatrice Kamuwanga, in an article published by the *Zambia Law Development Agency* in a news letter released in September 2005, supported the role of the declaration in the legal process by stating that 'a clause of discretion' gave the ruler some room for making an appropriate judgment. Kamuwanga perceived the declaration to be a 'value standard', rather than a legal one. She argued that, since all systems operate within a context of values, the choosing of a value system is acceptable. What requires evaluation, according to Kamuwanga, are the hallmarks of Christianity if truly they can provide a set of values for a nation without violating international law. She states:

*For Christianity in Zambia values – integrity, hard work, honesty, kindness, righteousness, sincerity and justice were looked at as some of the hallmarks of Christianity. However, the biggest challenge is how Christian morals and values can be promoted within a pluralistic society like Zambia especially where article 11 of the laws of Zambia recognized the freedom of conscience and religion. Who defines what passes as Christianity in Zambia?*

(ZLDA News Letter, September 2005)

The debate about what constituted a Christian nation continued to be high on the Christian agenda in every sphere. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) in its *'State of the Nation report'* at the end of 1997 lamented the exploitation of religion by many political leaders in Zambia. The commission strongly opposed the Zambian Christian nation declaration enshrined in the preamble of the Zambian Constitution in 1996 and emphasised the need for the separation between the 'church and state' (CCJP report, November 1997). The commission

called the declaration a shameful effort to claim God's approval for whatever policies and programmes a particular party puts forward (see Henriot 1998).

Due to the ongoing debate on the Zambian Christian nationhood declaration, the Mwanakatwe Commission which was instituted in 1993 to reform the *Constitution of the Republic of Zambia* was mandated to evaluate the declaration as well. On the issue of the Zambian nationhood, feelings were mixed among the different Christian bodies themselves with regard to the Christian nation declaration, not to mention among people of other faiths. The Pentecostal Movement in Zambia strongly supported the declaration, stressing the fact that they believed that it would bring righteousness and blessings to the country. In contrast, the Zambia Episcopal Conference and the Council of Churches in Zambia made submissions to the Constitution Review Commission (CRC) against the declaration that the state was Christian. Both bodies stated that Christianity must not be imposed, but should be accepted willingly by those concerned (2005:82).

However, during the promulgation of the Amendment to the Constitution, Parliament adopted a clause to include the Zambian Christian nation declaration in the Constitution. The clause reads as follows:

*We, the people of Zambia by our representative, assembled in our parliament, having solemnly resolved to maintain Zambia as a Sovereign Democratic Republic; Determined to uphold and exercise our inherent and inviolable right as a people to decide, appoint and proclaim the means and style to Govern ourselves; Recognize the equal worth of men and women in their rights to participate, and freely determine, and build a political, economical and social system of their own free choice; Pledge to ourselves that we shall ensure that the state shall respect the rights and dignity of the human family, uphold the law of the State and conduct the affairs of the state in such a manner as to preserve, develop, and utilize its resources for this and future generations; Declare the republic a Christian Nation while upholding the right of every person to enjoy that person's freedom of conscience or religion; Resolve to uphold the values of democracy, transparency, accountability and good governance; and further resolve that Zambia shall ever remain a unitary, indivisible, and multi-party and democratic sovereign state. Do hereby enact and give to ourselves this constitution.*

(*Constitution of Zambia Amendment Act 18 of 1996*)

Such wording in the preamble to the national Constitution resulted in even more of a stir in Zambia and abroad. By virtue of including it in the Zambian Constitution, the declaration became law and, therefore, binding on the state. Counter-arguments criticised such legislation as being tantamount to considering some citizens to be more Zambian than others; the rights of such citizens, including that of being able to contest the standpoint of the President, were given more credibility than were those of others, who automatically could only participate in performing relatively insignificant duties in the country.

### Implications of the declaration

Though the declaration upholds the right to exercise other religions, it includes a number of contradictions. According to Anyangwe a Professor of Law at the University of Zambia,

*You cannot favour one religion and at the same time honestly uphold the propagation and exercise of other religious beliefs that are doctrinally and in matters of faith opposed to the state-chosen religion.*

(NewZ, September 2005)

By singling out the Christian religion, the declaration, in itself, implies a certain understanding of the core principles of the country. In a truly democratic country, every citizen, including visitors from other nations must enjoy their freedom of choice and freedom of conscience. Articles 11, 19 and 23 of the constitution of Zambia all guarantee people in Zambia the right to enjoy fundamental human rights and the freedom of thought and religion (*Constitution of Zambia Act of 1991:18*). Talk of the

Christian nation in this regard, violates some of the tenets of democracy.

Further, the 'Christian nation' declaration is not only in conflict with Zambia's constitutional *Bill of Rights*, but is also inconsistent with the many different international human rights instruments to which Zambia has subscribed, such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, and the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights*. Such international instruments all guarantee the right to freedom of religion. When a state singles out one religion, declaring it to be the religion of the nation, which, in effect, is what the 'Christian nation' clause does, the state concerned is in breach of international human rights norms. Such breaching of norms also has political implications, especially in the light of the political tensions that exists between Muslims and Christians, resulting from the US-led international war on terrorism.

Though the Zambian 'Christian nation' declaration might be taken lightly by some, it could be misused by Christian fundamentalists. According to Anyangwe, the declaration does not merely have symbolic value (2005:4). Following on the example that was provided by the Afrikaner nation, in its formation of 'the new Israel' (De Gruchy 1979:239), which gave birth to the apartheid government in South Africa in 1948, the sentiment that has given rise to such a declaration has to be taken seriously, and one has to be mindful of its possible consequences. Supposing, say, a Christian fundamentalist were to accede to the high office of the President of the Republic of Zambia, the declaration could be used to impose Christian fundamentalist tenets and dogmas on all those living in Zambia. Such use would be unjust, for the practice of Christianity should not be imposed, but should be accepted willingly by those who are willing, on an individual basis, to profess their faith in Christ.

The declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation clearly implies that the Zambian government also has to be Christian in every sphere. Having a non-Christian government run the affairs of a Christian nation is untenable. In terms of the 'Christian nation' wording in the Constitution, all members of parliament, government ministers, judges and civil servants have to be committed Christians in order to be able to manage the affairs of the Christian nation.

The laws of Zambia would have to be consistent with Christian doctrines, dogmas and practices, if the nation is to abide by such a principle. In effect, such consistency would mean that the Bible, and Christian doctrines and dogmas, and not the Constitution as such, would be the supreme law of Zambia. According to Anyangwe, '[t]he Bible will become the linchpin of Zambia's educational system, even as the Holy Koran is in Islamic States (2005:6).'

In the light of the above findings, Christian leaders – namely, priests, ministers and pastors, whatever office they might hold in their respective Christian churches – would, in effect, be the real leaders of the country, since they would have the authority, by virtue of having been called to holy orders, to interpret the Bible, just as the Mullahs and the Ayatollahs, as the effective political rulers, do in certain Islamic states. My argument is that, even if there were to be a president or head of state, he would be a mere figurehead, because he will not have the power to determine and dictate authoritatively the Christian direction of the nation, nor the necessary holy inspiration to see whether a proposed measure or piece of legislation is consistent with the Bible. He would then have to depend on the sacred office of the church.

Such a scenario might seem bizarre to someone who takes only a fleeting glance at the 'Christian nation' clause, but it is, nonetheless, a real possibility and poses potential conflicts, not only between Christians and other religious groups, but also among the various Christian denominations who might become embroiled in a 'holy war' set on ensuring that their own brand of Christian teaching gains ascendancy in the state.

## BIBLICAL MODELS OF CHRISTIAN NATIONHOOD

### Old Testament – Israel, the people of God

According to the teachings contained in the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was religiously, politically and culturally regarded as 'the people of the Lord'. Even though there were some other religious practices, such as idol worship, that were current at the time described in the text, the nation's religion was held to be constitutionally binding on all Israelites, as well as on all foreigners who came to live among them. The entire religious establishment, including the officials, the vestments they wore, the manner in which they conducted their services, and even the prescriptions of their worship centres, were all aspects that were determined by God. The focus of Israelite worship was the Ark of the Covenant, which was the seat of God in the midst of the nation. Its creation was ordered by God, with its specifications being given by him (Ex 35–39). The sacrifices which were conducted were similarly determined (Lv 1–7, 16).

In the period before the kings began to rule Israel, the nation was effectually a theocracy, which was led by God, according to which certain prophets and judges, such as Moses, Joshua, Deborah and Samuel, were used as vice-regents. Their entire leadership over the children of Israel was based on their maintenance of constant consultation with God, as they had no autonomy in terms of leadership. Politically, all the institutions were also theocratic in nature. In reading the Old Testament, we note that the Constitution and the laws of the land were the Word of God. God brought judgment upon the people if they did not obey his instructions, which accounts for why the political institution of the monarchy of kingship was foreign to the Israelites. We note that, when the people of Israel demanded to have a king rule over them, in order to conform to the style of political leadership which was currently practised in the nations around them (1 Sm 8:50), both Samuel, the apparent national ruler, in his capacity as judge and prophet of God, recognised the request as a form of disobedience to God. In effect, the request was perceived as a rejection of God's leadership over the nation of Israel. However, when God granted the people's wish, the kingship still functioned under a theocracy. When Saul, as the first King, disobeyed God's instruction by taking on the role of a priest, which was the role that Chiluba assumed when he declared Zambia to be Christian, he was deposed from his Kingship. David was anointed as the new king, with his line in God's providence becoming the line of the descent of the Saviour of the world, who was, and is, Jesus Christ, God's Son, and the son of David (2 Sm 7:14–18; Mt 1). Kapolyo states, 'culturally, the Israelites' lives were regulated by the word of God through their priests and prophets. There were no other laws or constitution apart from the Torah and prophets (1997:32).'

To live as the covenant people of God, a symbol of the covenant was established by God, which was required to be obeyed by the people of Israel. Circumcision became a symbol of that covenantal relationship between Israel and God's people (Gn 17). Circumcision was not only an important religious duty, but also a significant practice in the cultural identity of the whole community. The book of Leviticus further prescribed what foods the people may eat, as well as how they should prepare that food. The book also contains regulations about health, sexual relations, holidays and festivals; in fact, there was a regulation in God's Word to guide the Israelites in every aspect of their cultural lives. In every sense, they were the people of God. The character that they possessed as a nation, consequently, was different to that of all the other nations around them. Their lives were guided by God Almighty.

In such a sense, Israelites' relationship with Yahweh is captured *inter alia* in the concept of sonship. Israel, as a nation, was the son of God. To determine the basis of their sonship, three considerations were set out, as outlined in Exodus 4:22, Hosea 11:1, Deuteronomy 32:6, 18, and Jeremiah 31:9. The first such consideration, which is emphasised in the Scriptures cited above, is the fact that the nation of Israel was specifically brought

into being as God's people. God did not consider the different nations of the world in order to choose one from among them to be his special people; he actually created a whole new nation for himself and raised it in line with his own purpose. Israel owes its existence, in brief, to the procreative act between two ninety-year-old people.

*Israel is the first son of Yahweh for no other reason than that Yahweh brought it as a nation into existence, just as its citizens are the people of God, for no other reason than that he 'Set his love upon' them and chose them for himself.*

(Wright 1997:18)

The second such consideration is that of the covenant. A number of different covenants can be found referred to in the Bible, including the new covenant about which Jeremiah spoke (Jr 31:31) and by which we are united to God. The Sinai covenant (Ex 19–24) is particularly significant, for it was the means by which God gave the instrument of government to the nation of Israel. The covenant had lists of conditions and obligations, which, if upheld in the society, led to the fulfilment of blessings (Dt 28:1–14). However, in contrast were fearful curses and punishments, which would result from disobedience (Dt 28:15–68). Such a covenant, although it has significant symbolic value to all of us Christians, was made with the nation of Israel, with the covenant being made complete by means of circumcision, which was regarded as the sign of membership in the nation (Gn 17:10; Jos 5:3). The covenant was a specific one, with a particular significance for Israel.

The third such consideration, consisting of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, was seen in God's provision of the land for the nation (Ex 15:1–17). Though the land was given in direct fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham (Gn 2:1), it remained Yahweh's land and the Israelites' occupancy of such land was conditioned by obedience to him and his people of foreign birth, who were allowed to colonise it (Dt 28:58–64; Nm 1:8–9).

The special sonship, the covenant and the land all form a three-strand cord which binds the nation of Israel to Yahweh. Such ties are clearly demonstrated in passages like Exodus 23:21–33, in which the following features are discernible:

- the exhortation to obedience (Ex 23:21, 22)
- the dispossession of the nations (Ex 23:23, 28)
- the prohibition on idol worship (Ex 23:24)
- the forbidding of contractual relations with the inhabitants of the land (Ex 23:32)
- the warning to beware the snare (Ex 23:33).

So, in the Old Testament we see a model of a nation which has peculiar features to which Zambia aspires, but which is, in fact, unrepeatable by any other nation on earth. Firstly, Zambia is not the nation of Israel, nor can its leaders initiate making the nation God's own, with only God being able to initiate such moves. Secondly, the features of that relationship defined the people's culture and political system, as well as their form of government. Finally, the symbols of the relationship were of paramount importance to the people of the Lord in Old Testament times. The Zambian Christian nationhood has no such symbols with which it can declare itself a 'Christian nation'. Clowney (1998:109) states, 'No state, no freedom fighters today can lay claim to Israel's theocratic calling as warriors of God's covenant'. The challenge is, therefore, to look elsewhere in the Bible to find a model which may inform the spirit of Zambian Christian nationhood.

## The attitudes of Jesus, Paul and Peter

### New Testament

**Jesus:** The New Testament opens with Jesus' genealogy, as compiled by Matthew and Luke. It is a significant fact that Jesus was born, lived and died under a pagan and foreign colonial power, namely the Roman government. When we examine Jesus' messages we see that he spoke about the kingdom of God which was near at hand (Mk 1:15) and not as one which was already in existence. What Jesus in his teaching referred to as

the rule of God's kingdom, which was present in his ministry, was expressed in delivering people from any form of captivity, including driving out demons (Lk 4:18–19; 11:20). By delivering people in such a way, Christ came to be proclaimed the Messiah (Mk 8:29–30), which was a title that was filled with militaristic and political aspirations. Jesus, however, kept his messianic secret about himself as pictured in the gospel according to Mark to himself. In all his deliberations with those surrounding him, Jesus did not give the impression that the kingdom of God and the validity of the Roman government were in conflict. We see that in his answer concerning the payment of taxes to Caesar (Mk 12:13–17). Jesus clearly indicated his view on the relationship between the state and the kingdom of God – namely, that that which belonged to God was to be seen as God's and that which belonged to Caesar was to be seen as Caesar's. In Jesus' reckoning, no conflict existed between the earthly and spiritual powers, as opposed to the current Zambian scenario, in terms of which the realm of politics is endeavouring to absorb that of the church. However, the main teaching that Jesus delivered was that the kingdom of God and the manifestations of humankind exist side by side, though they do not belong to the same realm. Throughout his teaching, Jesus neither endorsed, nor, in any way, supported the violent means by which the zealots wanted to inaugurate the era of the kingdom of God by means of falsehood, which is an attitude that we can see in the attempt that is being made to impose the 'Christian nation' concept on the Zambian situation. The personal Christian convictions of the President and a few other privileged politicians have tried to impose the concept on the Zambian nation without giving due consideration to the cultural determination of the people concerned. In contrast, Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God as an event in the future, which, nevertheless, was already present in his person and ministry (Lk 17:20–21). For Jesus, the kingdom of God was not in the future, but was already present in the world through the saving grace of God that was extended towards the individual (Klappert 1976:388; Moltmann 1999:77–85). No political system may compare itself with the kingdom of God, as it is only after the fulfilment of righteousness that Christ will exercise political authority over all the kingdoms of the earth (Mt 4:8; 28:18).

**Paul and Peter:** In Romans 1:1–7 and 1 Peter 2:13–17, the Apostles Paul and Peter, respectively, teach that Christians are obliged to obey those earthly authorities that have been placed in governance over them. The authorities themselves, who are clearly not the clergy, are said to be the servants and ministers of God. Though the Apostles no doubt did not endorse tyrannical rule, their public standing was that governments are instituted by God, and should govern justly and fairly. Given the existence of such a perspective, Christians were even called upon to pray regularly and publicly for their rulers (1 Tm 2:2–3). However, if those in authority were to command what God has forbidden, and to forbid what God has commanded, the Christian has a duty to disobey such rulings (Ac 4:19; see also Stott 1994:340). Even then, however, such disobedience was not to lead to the undermining of the concept of sound governance, which might lead to chaos and disorder, bringing about reprisals from the government of the day.

The above survey of biblical material shows that the teachings of the New Testament recognise that the Christian's attitude to the state should be informed by his or her faith and the values inherent therein. Any form of government is determined by the culture of the peoples among whom the Christian lives. Though Christians have some form of cultural allegiance, as Martin Luther puts it, 'the wicked will always outnumber the good'. Such thinking is challenging in the Zambian context. The New Testament does not provide a form of Christian government. Though Christians may wish to impose kingdom values onto civil governments and their organs of the state, the form that such a government takes is culturally determined. Despite the sovereign rule of God having ultimate authority over all the kingdoms in the world, it is culture that ultimately determines what form the government takes. Such a hierarchy of power is reflected in Jesus' answer to Pontius Pilate, in which he says, 'You would have no power over me if it were not given to

you from above' (Jn 19:11). Paul sums up this statement in his statement that 'all authority comes from God' (Rm 13). The institution of government, according to such thinking, is a gift that is made by God to human society. Such a gift should be valued and handled with care within a particular cultural context. God's concern for justice, the rule of law, the value of human life, and all other such matters should be reflected in any government. Any ruler can over-extend his mandate and God can intervene directly, not in order to institute an alternative Christian government or state, but to relieve the suffering of the many, and the consequent and unnecessary loss of life. God, however, does not regard it as his primary concern to take over culturally determined governments and to replace them with Christian ones, as if Christianity existed in a cultural vacuum. As with any other sector of society, a form of government is a creation of culture.

## Historical and theological models

Let us now briefly discuss some historical and theological models of declared Christian nations to see whether or not Zambia has the capacity to determine what may serve as a guide for an understanding of its own situation of Christian nationhood. Regarding the historical aspect, the Edict of Milan might be able to serve as a starting point in seeking to understand the Zambian situation. My theological perspective considers the contribution of H. Richard Niebuhr's fivefold typology of the possible relationships between the gospel and culture, which will be referred to as the church and the state (Niebuhr 1951:61–71). My consideration of the topic will lead us into formulating a Christian ethical framework that might act as a paradigm for the concept of the Christian nation.

### Historical models

#### The Edict of Milan

The best model that might serve as a mirror for the assessment of the Zambian situation is the Edict of Milan (AD 313), in terms of which Emperors Constantine Augustus (c. 280–337) and Valerius Licinianus (c. 250–325) declared all religions legal within the Roman Empire. The Edict, though universal in its application, was especially intended to legalise the status of Christianity above all other religions in the Roman Empire. The Edict mercifully brought to an end the imposed persecution of the Christians and brought the church into union with the state. Such a declaration resulted in Constantine proclaiming himself the head of the Catholic Church and in him summoning the bishops to Nicaea in AD 325, over which gathering he himself would preside. Accordingly, the church became part of the state and the state became part of the church. Paganism, as the heretofore official religion of the Empire, and particularly of the army, was disestablished, and any property which had previously been confiscated from Christians was returned to them.

After the decree had been enacted, it served as the linchpin of the relationship between the church and the state. The existing church leaders were immediately incorporated into the Roman government of the Empire, with the church coming to receive all the support that it needed. The pagans were commanded to pay the debts that the church incurred. Those possessions that had been confiscated from the church were returned to it. Such a move led Constantine to gain unlimited control over the church, despite the fact that he was not a baptised Christian. In this way, church–state relations helped to undermine the true gospel of Christ.

By critically examining church–state relations during Constantine's era, it can be seen how an attempt was made to resurrect the Edict of Milan in Zambia in the form of Fredrick Chiluba's declaration that Zambia was a Christian nation. In this sense, as it was in Constantine's era, Christianity is seen to be transformed into a preferred religion of the state by presidential decree. In Zambia, Christianity is viewed as being more important than are other religions which are also currently practised in the country.

Constantine's main aim was for the church bishops to join the bureaucrats in forming a new governing class in the Empire, which would enable him to preside over both entities. Brown (1971:104) noted that informs us that, 'the bishops of Italy became the heirs of the Roman senate, and the Bishop of Rome became the emperor's successor'. The Zambian declaration is aimed at achieving the same goals, which amount to the state adopting the same stance as the church, and favouring Christians, whereas it gives only nominal recognition to other religions that are also practised in the country. The adoption of such a stance poses many risks, as it places the leaders of the state and those of the church in a critical dilemma. Zambia's declaration clearly resembles the declaration which was made by the Roman Emperor as a Christian. Similarities relating to the issue of compromise are evident in the way in which the preamble to the Zambian Constitution and the Edict of Milan are worded, as can be seen in the following excerpts, the former of which has been taken from the *Constitution of Zambia Act No. 18 of 1996*, and the latter from the Edict of Milan (312):

*We the people of Zambia ... declare the Republic a Christian Nation while upholding the right of every person to enjoy that person's freedom of conscience and religion.*

*Since we saw that freedom of worship ought not to be denied ... to each man's judgment and will the right should be given to care for sacred things according to each man's free choice.*

Both declarations contain a compromising statement. Any attempt to make a region Christian by decree is ultimately bound to have devastating consequences. Though the Edict of Milan was aimed at preventing the persecution of Christians, such persecution was largely not brought to an end. Eusebius found that

*unfortunately, the edict did not end all persecution of Christians happily after; the Eastern Emperor, so marched against Constantine to gain control of the whole Empire himself. In so doing he made void the edict in an attempt to gain support of pagans, particularly those who composed much of the military*

(From Lactantius, *De Mort. Pers.*, ch. 48. Opera, ed. O. F. Fritzsche, II, p 288 sq. [Bibl Patr. Ecc. Lat. XI])

In a similar vein, since Zambia was declared a 'Christian nation' in 1991 and since such a principle was enshrined in the Constitution of the state in 1996, Transparency International has reported an increase in corruption levels, and the drastic decline of moral standards in government circles. Such a deterioration in the ethical behaviour of leading public servants led to the prosecution of senior government officials in 2002. These prosecutions were conducted by the late President Levy Mwanawasa, who led the Movement for Multi Party's (MMD's) New Deal administration from 2001 until his death on 19 August 2008.

Such events clearly show that Christianity should best be manifested as a way of life, rather than in the mere utterance of words. Professor Anyangwe (2005) of the School of Law at the University of Zambia emphatically states,

*Zambia's subscription to Christianity should be manifest in the way its citizens conduct themselves, and not in the Pharisee-like Christian nation proclamation. Credible Christians, or countries that espouse Christian virtues, do not go around proclaiming it on rooftops. Their Christanness is immediately apparent in the way they carry and conduct themselves. A tiger does not proclaim its 'Tigeriness'. 'When you see a Tiger you know it is a Tiger.'*

(Anyangwe 2005:8)

Nevertheless, the number of Christians, especially those belonging to the Pentecostal churches, who live in Zambia since the declaration has grown more than during any other period in history. Only Christian television programmes gain airing on national television. The establishment of Christian radio stations and Christian television stations across the country has also contributed to the growth of the church. However, in terms of the *United Nation's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, it might be the case that Zambia has been allowed to get away with

violating the ideals and rights of others by decree. Such possible violation requires analysis.

## Theological models

### Richard Niebuhr's fivefold typology

Richard Niebuhr's (1951) fivefold typology models of the relationship between Christ and culture are used as a point of departure in discussing theological models that might closely inform Zambia's situation. The church clearly does not exist in a vacuum, but rather is made incarnate out of the culture of the people and exists as a natural religion, rather than as a supernatural one. In my critical analysis of the notion of Zambian Christian nationhood, I use the same headings that Richard Niebuhr uses in his argument regarding the relationship between Christ and culture.

**The church against the state:** The Reformation of the 16th century was key to the development of the stance of the church in relation to the state. Martin Luther and his contemporaries would not have conceived of any nation on earth, including Zambia, being declared Christian in the way in which Zambia has been. They did not regard the church and the state as existing on the same level, as they are clearly guided by different ethical standards. Most reformers, most notably the Anabaptists, drew a sharp distinction between the kingdoms of this world, which they considered to be evil, and the kingdom of God, to which the Christian belongs. They argued that this world order is so totally corrupt that to confuse political issues with those of the church is against the gospel. In order to retain its distinctness from the world, the church needs to maintain its integrity in prophetically witnessing to the world and its political systems, so that human dignity might be preserved and the message of salvation brought to all the world. The gospel of Christ is viewed as the purifier of the darkened world. The main argument is that, if the world is corrupt, then the church and Christian teachings should be opposed to all forms of state. From such a perspective, the church's primary role and duty is to evangelise and to save as many people as possible from this corrupt world in order to maintain the kingdom of God free of corruption.

The talk of any form of a Christian nation, in such a case, would be understood to contradict the ideals of Christianity. By definition, a nation or state is full of corruption and evil, and can never be Christian, not even by declaration. The concept of Zambian Christian nationhood, in such a context, is not credible.

**The church in tension with the state:** The world in which we live has two recognised institutions: religion (in the form of the church) and the state. The two institutions are found in any society, even in that which is atheist. Though both institutions are legitimate, they operate along very different lines. For example, the church is ordered in terms of the ethic of love, whereas the state is ordered in terms of the less important ethic of justice. As the church is given birth in the context of the world, it has to function in relation to the 'state', else it would be ignoring the very context in which it arose. All citizens participate in governance to improve the world, but for the church to fight for political power would involve it at an inappropriately low level of engagement. The Zambian Christian nation declaration clears the way for the development of tensions to develop between the church and the state regarding who has the most power.

Christians, in both private and public life, often fall far short of the demands of justice in this world. Whereas God's justice and love are two sides of the same coin, justice in worldly terms may well be the political expression of love, but it is an inferior form of love to that of God. In comparison to the latter, the church in Zambia has a higher calling in regards to its rendering of service to the world, which is required to be offered in a truly loving way to all to whom it supplies such comfort.

**The church above state:** The church in this world belongs to two realms: the realm of grace and the realm of nature. The two realms should operate side by side, although the former is on a

higher plane. Such an understanding means that grace should be born out of nature, with the former purifying and justifying the latter. Such a situation is due to the fact that nature, of which government is a part, is not inherently evil. Politics and statecraft, along with economics, cultural matters and other social concerns, all belong to the realm of nature, with Christians having a mandate to engage freely with such concerns, because they are legitimate enterprises. In fact, the Christian's involvement in nature introduces God's grace into politics and other cultural concerns.

Seen in terms of such a perspective, the concept of Christian nationhood is clearly undesirable, as such a concept might easily lead to confusion between the two orders of grace and nature. However, in the long run, as was true for both Luther and Calvin, 'God's kingdom tends over against the state' (Kapolyo 1997:9), with the understanding of the two not integrating in the form of a single whole being pleasing to God (Luther 1523:3). A sound basis for implementation of the practice of Christian nationhood cannot exist in a situation in which the church has priority over the state, with Christians – but not the church – being able to engage in politics.

**The church embraces the state:** Three obvious contemporary examples of the church embracing the state are those of apartheid South Africa, Northern Ireland and Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority movement in the United States. Churches that embrace the state tend, uncritically, to adopt the symbols of the nation of Israel. Zambia, too, upon declaration of its stance on the concept of Christian nationhood was called the new 'Israel'.

In South Africa, the *Afrikaner*, during the apartheid era, believed that God is on his side, and therefore victory of any kind is assured. The *Afrikaner* nation has become a very special people to God; it is a holy nation, a Church. The whole *Afrikaner* nation is the church. The two are identical. One has been fused into the other. Therefore the policies of *Afrikanerdom* are divinely ordained and any opposition is perceived to be in opposition to God. (De Gruchy 1979:201–202)

The adoption of such an approach by the *Afrikaner* clearly indicates that the church was conceived as not being that of Christ, but, rather, of the nation.

The characteristics of the situation in Northern Ireland share much in common with the essential features of apartheid policies, in terms of which South Africa was ruled for over forty years. The *Afrikaner* mindset is similar to that of the conservative Irish Protestant. For instance, the call to fight 'for God and Ulster' clearly fuses the preaching of the Protestant Church of Jesus Christ with that of the state of Ulster. The individual loyalist commitment to the church is inseparable from his commitment to Ulster as a political entity.

Similarly, Jerry Falwell, the leading American Moral Majority protagonist, has been quoted as saying:

*God has raised America in these last days for the cause of world Evangelization, and for the protection of his people, the Jews. I don't think America has any other right or reason for existence other than these two purposes. God has blessed America because we have done more for the cause of world Evangelization than any other nation.*

(Christianity Today 1981:15)

The case for Zambia's 'Christian nation' declaration in 1991 should consider the turmoil that identification of the church with any one nation has caused in South Africa, Northern Ireland and the Middle East. Such turmoil must surely be reason enough for all Christians to be cautious about declarations which too closely identify the Christian ideals and aspirations of any geopolitical entity. In the presidential address to the nation, in the aftermath of the 28 October 1997 abortive military coup, led by Captain Stephen Lungu of the Zambia Army, President Fredrick Chiluba of Zambia repeatedly quoted words of Scripture in his address to the nation by saying:

*In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I say no weapon formed against our government, no weapons surely formed against us, shall ever prosper. Yes, they surely gathered together but not by the Lord, and those who have gathered together have fallen ... every inch of our soil is Christian and belongs to the Lord. The Lord Jesus is in full control. Be not afraid; don't be intimidated, there shall be no power greater than that of our Lord Jesus. For he who is inside us is greater than the enemy outside and those with us are more than those against us. Be not afraid the Lord is keeping his hand on our nation ... We shall continue with the Lord's programme, we shall continue with the political programme, we shall continue also with the economical programme.*

(ZNBC 28 October 1997)

Such a speech, in the absence of a clearly defined relationship between the church of Jesus Christ and Zambia, the 'Christian nation', come dangerously close to sentiments that the Afrikaner government in South Africa often expressed in the attempt to keep the church and the state as one.

The first piece of constitutional reform that was promulgated after the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation has effectively served to divide Zambians into two groups. On the one hand, there are those who are regarded as being more Zambian than others and whose rights, including that of running for presidency, are constitutionally protected. On the other hand, there are those who are regarded as being less Zambian, and who are, therefore, denied their human right to aspire to lead the nation in a presidential capacity. Religious declarations can clearly be used as a tool with which to foment civil strife, as can be witnessed in the behaviour of the Islamic states.

**The church transforms the state:** Without doubt, the church is in a position to transform society, due to its leading role in being a restorer of the natural status quo. The basis for making such a standpoint is that culture, including the concept of government and other political structures, is God-given and is, therefore, a legitimate area of engagement for the church. Christian politicians, whose guiding principles are derived from their faith in, and love of, Christ, can belong to the church. The presence of Christian office-bearers in politics is a means for them to express their calling to serve the people faithfully. The same cannot be said about a Christian nation, especially if it is declared to be such on the grounds of one man's personal convictions. The sovereignty of the Lord or the Lordship of Christ in any nation is realised when Christians in a country submit every area of their life and work, including their political outlook, to the rule of God. By extension, a Christian nation would only be feasible, at least in theory, if all the key players in the legislature, the judiciary, the executive and all other organs of the state were to discern the will of God. Their value and worldviews would have to be formed and shaped by the Word of God, and their unshakable faith in Jesus Christ would have to inform all judgments that they make in their work, which they totally subject to God's divine authority. A declaration of any nation as Christian cannot be top-down but must be bottom-up, as propelled by cultural determination.

### Ethical framework

In considering a number of paradigms in understanding the Zambian 'Christian nation' declaration of 29 December 1991, it suffices to state that a Christian ethical framework should be based on Jesus' commandment, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might' (Dt 6:4, affirmed as the great commandment by Jesus in Mt 22:37).

The Hebrew words for 'heart', 'soul' and 'might' can be interpreted as referring to everything that pertains to the whole person, namely to their intellect, emotions and material possessions. Such an interpretation suggests that Christian faith and involvement has not only to do with the mind and emotions of believers, but affects their work and material circumstances as well. The environmental and cultural aspects of human beings require that they are involved in the world over which God

gave them dominion. Such an aspect presupposes the idea that Pannenberg raises in his book, *What is Man?* He proposes that 'man's destiny is defined by his openness to God and openness to the World' (1970:10)

Pannenberg's assertion points to the fact that, if a person desires to understand the world in which he or she lives and all the related responsibilities, he must be totally dependent upon God, who is the master of existence. Such an idea alludes to the fact that the whole person has, by nature, been destined to be culturally conditioned in heart, soul and mind to obedience to God. Such a value system cannot be enforced by decree, but can only result from a willingness and desire to conform to culturally determined dictates. Such compliance results from adherence to the Second Commandment, 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Lv 19:18, which is affirmed as the Second Commandment in Mt 22:39) and from communicating the significance of human dynamics. The basis of such a commandment is that religion, in biblical terms, does not exist in a vacuum, but is instead corporate, relying upon adherence to a set of values that emanates from different individuals and societies.

Therefore, it is up to each individual to respond on a personal level and to decide for themselves which way to go, which should be determined out of unconditional love. Though Christians are called to evangelise to others, they cannot declare allegiance to Christianity on behalf of others. In such terms, the concept of 'love your neighbour as yourself' suggests the openness and respect which we intend to show towards others who might not believe in the same God as we do. Our form of engagement with others, in the light of the above-mentioned commandment, cannot be imposed upon others, but is, rather, culturally determined. If Christianity should, therefore, be the religion of the state, it must have the ability to incarnate in the cultures of the people within the state and must be able to root itself naturally. It must be remembered that, when the Jews questioned Jesus regarding the need to pay taxes to Caesar, Jesus answered, 'render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's' (Mt 22:21).

In biblical times, the culture of the people involved paying allegiance to the emperor and this included paying taxes. This was the acceptable way of behaviour, both in terms of the prevailing norm and culture. In the ancient world, the coinage that bore the emperor's image was considered to be the emperor's property (Rodgers 2006:25). Such a view did not mean that Jesus authorised the state (Caesar) to have authority over all aspects of human life, save that of religion, but that true religion required unquestioning obedience to the state. Such a view does not conflict with the first and greatest commandment to 'love God'. The state, therefore, even if it is led by a Christian ruler, king, or president, cannot determine what the church or its people should be. Such an understanding has placed the Zambian church in a dilemma. The church is present in the world as part of the world, and not as a separate entity within it. In response to Pontius Pilate, Jesus, at the time of being handed over to be crucified, stated that 'my kingdom is not of this world' (Jn 18:36). Such an assertion does not mean that the Christian gospel is concerned only with the 'spiritual' world, or with what happens to people after they have died. The assertion serves to affirm that Christ's kingdom, which is present in the world, operates in accordance with a different set of values from those that govern much of human life, though such values are culturally approved within the framework of the world.

The responsibility of the church is to be aware of kingdom values and their costliness, in terms of which it should assist believers to proclaim the full kingdom truth, which they can live out in a social milieu. The authenticity of the value system of believers should exert influence over the culture of the surrounding peoples, so that their cultural attitudes also conform to the requirements for purification in terms of God's set of values. Such a perspective does not reject the idea that Christianity has political aims, but takes into consideration that the concept of

God in Christ is not a mere matter of changing personal outlook in a world that remains unchanged, but rather 'the creation of the new persons who are given a charter self call for a new world in which social justice banishes everything that mars the divine image in human kind' (Rogerson 2006:2). The basis for the creation of the new world and new persons is not founded on self-proclamation or decree, but is rather founded on reaching out to individuals and the world for its own sake. The new world order will not come about through persuading others to be carbon copies of oneself in terms of beliefs and practice. God is mindful of human beings and he has bestowed unimaginable dignity on all human existence. As a result, a primary duty of humankind is to exercise responsible stewardship over a world which is on loan to them and not a possession of theirs. To declare a nation 'Christian', therefore, suggests that the church is not the church of God, but the church of the nation, with Christ simply being brought on board.

### CONCLUSION

The Zambian 'Christian nation' declaration has given a new dimension of criticism to Zambia, which declares itself as living according to the righteous standards of God. As the declaration itself is a unique concept for Zambia, it calls for fresh thinking, if there is to be mutual understanding of such a concept. The Zambian Church faces the same daunting challenge that the church of the 4th century did when Emperor Constantine declared that Christians were free to propagate the gospel. The most important conclusion drawn with regard to the Zambian situation is that, despite the fact that 'Christendom is dying in most of the places and dead in many others' (Carter 2006:211), the Constitution of Zambia grants Christians freedom of expression to formulate those laws that will promote morally upright standards. Though members of the Zambian church have the opportunity freely to affirm their faith, being constitutionally protected by the state does not guarantee that Christianity will be successful overall. Christian nationhood can be truly authentic only when faith communities become culturally conditioned, when the gospel affects the way in which people live and becomes part of the values that the Christian nation affirms. I contend that the declaration of such nationhood remains hollow if the Christian ideals that it seeks to entrench do not affect the way in which people live and make decisions.

The sustainability of the concept of Zambian Christian nationhood lies in learning from the historical paradigms of Christian states that have now all reverted to being pagan states. Zambia's situation is based on the awareness that the church has a mission in the world to preach the gospel. If, in order to comply with the requirements of the declaration, the church is caught up in politicising the gospel message, it is bound to lose at least some of its integrity. The church of Jesus Christ will disappear, and evil regimes will take hold of the state and persecute Christians unimaginably.

When the church of the fourth century was tempted by Constantine's offer of respectability, wealth, freedom from persecution and the forced suppression of heretics and unbelievers, it lost touch with the true gospel; the turmoil that followed was devastating. I, therefore, contend that if the church of Jesus Christ in Zambia is to survive untarnished by political will, it must be more effective than the declaration and incarnate itself in the lives and culture of the people on the ground. The gospel should be embodied in the actions of Christ's followers

for it to be accepted and appreciated. Such is the challenge presented to believers in the gospel in the 'New Israel' Zambia: the 'Christian nation'.

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